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# A Dunhuang Tibetan Aspirational Prayer for Rebirth in Amitābha's Pure Land

*In memory of my dear friend Seishi Karashima*

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## **Abstract:**

Pelliot tibétain 153 is a short Tibetan document containing a poem of 155 lines, being a prayer for the rebirth of a deceased person in the Pure Land of Amitābha. In so far as is known, it is a unique manuscript. It is here edited, provided with an English translation and a Commentary, in which some of the possible sources of the work are suggested. The work seems to be indebted to Chinese conceptions and formulations, although there is no evidence that it is a translation. It thus constitutes part of the body of materials, probably composed in Dunhuang, related to what much later and far away became understood as Pure Land Buddhism.

## **Keywords:**

Dunhuang, Tibetan, Amitābha, Sukhāvātī, Prayer, Pure Land

It has become increasingly apparent in recent years that medieval Dunhuang, in roughly the 8th-11th centuries, fostered a form of Buddhism which, while functioning linguistically in a Tibetan environment, found its inspiration, at least in part, from a Chinese milieu. Among the literary sources for this Sino-Tibetan Buddhism, those related to Chan are of course much studied, chiefly perhaps not only because of a general interest in Chan, but also because of their connection with the so-called Bsam yas debates. There also exist documents belonging to this same place and time which, however, offer evidence for the existence of another community (which might well have been unrelated to that—or those—focused on Chan), this community orienting itself instead (again, at least in part) toward what might in a loose sense be called Pure Land Buddhism. It is not unreasonable to suppose that, while Pure Land Buddhism is as well studied as Chan, these materials have garnered less attention than have the Chan documents because they appear to have had no known influence on later and mainstream Tibetan Buddhism, whereas Chan documents have been justifiably intimately linked to the very birth of Buddhism in Tibet.

Be that as it may, in order to understand the Buddhist landscape of medieval Dunhuang, it is necessary to pay equal attention to all varieties of evidence, irrespective of what may have been the later impacts or influences of the thus documented traditions. In this regard, a number of relevant “Pure Land” texts have so far been identified which offer first-hand evidence

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of this particular—as I would argue—form of cultic activity. Some of these have been edited and studied, while others are now under examination.<sup>2</sup>

In the present article I present a short poetic (or at least verse) work which was first, to my knowledge, studied by the scholar who pioneered this field, Akamatsu Kōshō, and published by him in 1988. Here I reedit the Tibetan text from its single known witness, offer a translation, and add a commentary in an attempt to contextualize the work by bringing forward scriptural passages that might have served as sources for the author. Much of this, it must be emphasized, starting with the notice of the importance of the manuscript, I owe to the earlier work of Akamatsu.<sup>3</sup> However, I believe that, in part because of access to good color photos, and in part thanks to a new recognition of the nature of the document (this due primarily to insights shared with me by Péter-Dániel Szántó), some improvements may now be made.

The Tibetan manuscript from Dunhuang preserved now in Paris as Pelliot tibétain 153 is described in her catalogue by Marcelle Lalou (1939) as follows:

*\*Mahāyānaprañidhāna?*

Début: *myi che 'das-pa-la dkon-m'chog gsum-gyis byin-kyis-brlab-ste mtho-risu gtañ-ba // sna 'das da-ltar phyir byon pa' // dkon-m'chog gsum-la phyag 'chal-lo // phyogs bču'i sañs-rgyas...*  
s'arrête (recto): ... *skye-ba myed-na 'chi-ba yang myed // skye yod* (le vers est terminé au verso)  
*theg-pa chen-po'i smon-lam rjogs so* (titre (?) entièrement biffé). Au verso (suite du texte): *'chi yod de bscal-na // dka'-thub theg chen de spyad de // nan joñ rgyud drug lam b'cad cing // theg-pa'i skas-la rim 'jeg ste // snañ-ba mtha'-yas gnas rab-du // rnam-dag žiñ der skye-bar çog //*  
1 rouleau (25 x 70), début usé, fin mutilée.

The text thus apparently calls itself a “Mahāyāna Aspirational Vow” (*theg pa chen po'i smon lam*, line 155). It seems to belong, more specifically, in the grouping of what I above probably incautiously termed “Pure Land.” I have, however, critiqued this classification elsewhere,<sup>4</sup> so for the present I simply say that in my opinion Pure Land *pur sang* belongs to a Japanese milieu centuries later than the time of the text studied here. Nevertheless, since the text does appear to focus on the salvific promises of the buddha named Endless Radiance, as this text calls him, that is, Amitābha, from a cultic perspective it is Amitābha-centric.<sup>5</sup>

The poem is written in seven syllable lines. We would expect that the text should divide naturally into units of four lines, but this seems rather often not to be possible in terms of coherence of content, and after an attempt to divide and number the text according to units of meaning, I gave up and followed instead the advice of Dan Martin, numbering the lines instead (this is separate from the numbering of the lines of the manuscript). I have separated the text into units, but this should be considered provisional. Where there are no such divisions, it

<sup>2</sup> See for convenience Silk 1993, 2014, 2017, 2019a, 2019b, and the literature cited therein. I should stress that we know, so far, little about the embedding of these materials in the religious life of Dunhuang, and thus I am not intending here to make far-reaching claims about praxis orientations.

<sup>3</sup> A few of the suggested corrections to the manuscript, and some of the references to sources, are found in Akamatsu's article. I do not note them further. I am immensely grateful for his expert work, although in terms of the translation in particular, I sometimes cannot agree with his understanding.

<sup>4</sup> See most recently esp. Silk 2019a: 526–527n17.

<sup>5</sup> It is probably needless to say that our text may also be understood within the context of the well-known Tibetan genre of works dealing with the afterlife and guidance thereto, the so-called Bar do literature. Considerations of the possible relations of our text with such materials are beyond the scope of the present contribution.

does not follow that the text is necessarily continuous in terms of the author's intention, nor vice versa, and I hope that future research will help to clarify the structure of the work. The translation does not, for syntactic reasons, necessarily always follow the Tibetan line by line. In one place the scribe appears to have omitted some text, though we cannot know how much has been lost, in another case it appears that a line was copied out of sequence, and a number of words have been dropped, as we can detect on the basis of both sense and meter. Spellings are often non-classical, but if they represent otherwise attested forms I have not ventured to emend, in light of what I believe to be both the unsettled spelling of earlier Tibetan, and our general ignorance of the borders between acceptable variation and error.

I have been unable to find a single, direct source for this poem. I doubt at this point that the text was translated from Chinese, but the syntax and grammar seem to point to some slight discomfort with Tibetan syntax and sentence structure here and there, although naturally this is a subjective impression, and the verse format makes such impressions particularly problematic. It may well be an original composition, but the errors noted above prove that the extant manuscript is certainly not the author's autograph.

### The Text Itself:

The poem under study here is clearly intended as a sort of ritual text, in the sense that its funerary context is obvious: it proclaims at its outset that it sends a deceased individual (*myi tshe +das pa*, one whose time has come) to heaven (*mtho ris*, Skt. *svarga*), a peculiar expression given that the text is concentrated on the so-called Pure Land of the buddha Amitābha (*snang ba mtha' yas*), Sukhāvātī.<sup>6</sup>

It begins with a wish that all beings be able to take advantage of the salvific activity of the compassionate buddhas (3–6), then proclaiming that the range of activity of these saviors extends even to the bottom of existence in the hells (7–9). The text then requests, as I understand it, these buddhas, who exist everywhere, to take care of the deceased. Next comes a confession of faith (15–17), and the aspiration to Ultimate Awakening, a standard Mahāyāna aspiration (18–27).

Following this the text seems to be proclaiming the varieties of ways in which beings approach the teachings of the Buddha, and that the Buddha (or buddha-principle?) therefore taught them under different forms. If the word *mtshan* (33) has been understood properly, the claim is that while there are names of various buddhas, in the end these are all one.

The next passage (35–38) introduces one special buddha, namely Amitābha, and the land he created, here as yet unnamed but characterized by joy and bliss. In the following (39–82) the various features of the land are mentioned, the scriptural sources of which are to be found in the Commentary below.

Beings in that land will go on to attain Unexcelled Perfect Awakening (83–85). Next are introduced the two assistants of the buddha, namely the bodhisattvas Avalokiteśvara and Mahāsthāmaprāpta (86–91), although only the former is mentioned again (107). The text then refers to the vows of the bodhisattva Dharmākara by stating that merely hearing the name of

<sup>6</sup> As Kapstein (2000: 8) points out with regard to the text preserved in Pelliot tibétain 239 (trans. Kapstein 2004b: 20–22), “Unlike the later Tibet traditions of the *bar-do*, which direct the deceased to avoid all realms of rebirth, and to attain the highest enlightenment without falling into either infernal or divine abodes, the ‘teaching of the path to the gods’ realm’ [i.e., Pelliot tibétain 239—JAS] regards divine rebirth as a passage through which one must journey in order to arrive at Buddhism’s supreme end.” This may provide a possible point of contact with our text.

the buddha will ensure liberation. An evident eye-skip in copying the text has led to an unclear passage (95–96). Then the text repeats what was said earlier about taking refuge and making the aspiration for Ultimate Awakening, and one told to call the name of the buddha while concentrating on his land, evidently then referring to the practice of calling aloud what in Chinese is *Amituofo* (101).<sup>7</sup> One will imagine one's own death and rebirth in the Pure Land. At one's death (this is not stated explicitly, but is implied, but see 135–137, where that buddha is said indeed to greet beings), the buddha will greet one and accompany one to the land, as described in Dharmākara's vows, where one will be placed in the care of the bodhi-sattva Avalokiteśvara (107).

The buddha Amitābha is said to guide beings with the ten perfections, which are then serially listed along with, in each case, the obstacle from which each perfection saves beings (108–130). The text then seems to say that the buddha will lead beings not to be satisfied with rebirth in saṃsāra, but instead to aspire to the Pure Land, whence they will achieve Ultimate Awakening (131–134). The buddha, as just mentioned, greets beings (135–137), and they will be born in his land instantaneously (138–140). Next follow several difficult passages, apparently about the mode of teaching of the buddha, in a seemingly philosophical vein (141–146), until finally one becomes free of unfortunate rebirths and may be born in the Pure Land.

### Structure:

We may map the overall structure of the work as follows:

Invocation, Praise of Buddhas and Request for Favor	3–14
Refuge	15–18
Aspiration to Awakening	19–26
Differences of Beings	27–34
Introduction of Amitābha	35–38
The Land	39–91
Beings in the Land	92–104
Role of the Buddha	105–137
Ten Perfections	110–130
Instantaneous birth in the land	138–140
Buddha's mode of teaching	141–146
From saṃsāra to the Pure Land	147–154

### The Edition:

[ *italics* ] = Supplemented unreadable characters, damaged or entirely missing in the MS.

< *italics* > = Omitted by the scribe but suggested based on context.

ĩ = reversed *gi gu*.

+ = 'a *rten* with a 'flag' on the right top.

Line numbers of the manuscript are inserted in brackets and subscript.

The edition here is based on the color photographs made available by the websites of the Bibliothèque nationale de France and Artstor.

<sup>7</sup> On the merits of calling this name aloud in a Dunhuang Tibetan text, see Silk 2019a.

[r1] myī tshe +das pa la dkon mchog gsum gis byin kyis brlabste mtho risu gtang ba || [r2]  
xxx snga +das da ltar phyir byon pa+i || dkon mchog gsum la phyag +tshalo || <sup>8</sup>

The portion marked with x is damaged in the manuscript. Two or three letters may have been written here,  
but from the point of view of meaning it is not clear that anything essential is missing.

phyogs bcu'i [r3] sangs rgyas bcom ldan +das |  
mnyam myed ye shes thugs mnga+ ba'i  
thugs rje rol pa+i spyod yul [r4] du || [5]  
+gro ba'i sems can thams cad +gyur |

sams can mtha' dang thugs rjer mnyam ||  
+dren pa dmyal [r5] ba yan cad de |  
spyod pa rdzu 'phrul thabs kyis mdzad |

8: cad ] MS ca

9: thabs] MS thams

grub <pa> skad cīg yud tsam la | [10]  
dus gsum gang [r6] [da]g pa las rung |

khyab pa nam ka 'tha' yas mjal |  
stobs dang myī 'jīgs thub ldan bas || [r7]  
[tham]s cad mkhyen pas 'dī la dgongs |

12: 'tha' yas ] MS 'tha' yis

bdag cag skyabsu mchī' ba nī | [15]  
log 'gro gzhan du ma [r8] lags ste |  
dkon mchog gsum la skyabsu mchī'o ||

bskyed pa gzhan du ma lagste ||  
byang cub mchog du [r9] [se]ms bskyed do ||

gsol ba gzhan du ma lags te || [20]  
snyīng po byang cub mchog la dgod ||

spyad pa gzhan du [r10] ma lags te ||  
bla myed don rnam gzhar myī gtang ||

yī dam gzhan du ma lagste |  
theg chen mtshan [r11] myed de la gnas || [25]

smon lam gzhan du ma lags te ||  
smon myed thar pa+i sgo mor 'jug |

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<sup>8.</sup> Akamatsu treated this as a verse, but I do not see how this would be possible metrically.

phyogs <sub>[r12]</sub> bcu nam ka dbyings gcig ste ||  
lho byang shar nub 'tshams myi phyed ||

sangs rgyas yon tan mtshungs <sub>[r13]</sub> mnyam ste || [30]  
che chung khyad bar bye brag myed ||  
sems can dad pa myi mthun phyir ||  
sangs rgyas so sor mtshan re bstan ||  
'gro <sub>[r14]</sub> ba rang dbang smon bzhin skye ||  
32: myi mthun phyir written below the line  
33: sangs rgyas below the line, followed by ~~mtshan re~~

nub phyog dag pa+i 'jig rten na || [35]  
sangs rgyas snang ba mtha' yas bzhugs || <sub>[r15]</sub>  
rnam dag spyod pa de zhing na ||  
dga' zhing bde ba dpag du myed ||  
38: dga' zhing ] MS dga' zhing ~~spyod~~

snang ba mtha' yas de zhing na ||  
+khor ra <sub>[r16]</sub> 'khor yug lcags ri dang || [40]  
ri rabs lhun dang ri gzhan myed |  
mtsho dang rtsang po +bab chu myed ||  
yon tan <sub>[r17]</sub> brgyad tang ldan ba 'i chu ||  
43: ldan ba 'i chu ] MS ldan ba ~~ñ~~ 'i chu

de'i nang na sgra grag pa ||  
dkon mchog gsum gi mtshan rnams tang | [45]  
pha rol <sub>[r18]</sub> phyin pa bcu las stsogs ||  
don mchog sgra snyan rang 'byung ngo ||  
47: don mchog sgra ] MS don mchog ~~sny~~ sgra

snang ba mtha' yas de zhing na |  
can <sub>[r19]</sub> 'dan spos shing mang po dang ||  
rin cen sna tshogs tshal yod de || [50]  
yal ga lo ma men tog dang  
snying po <sub>[r20]</sub> 'bras bu 'od 'bar gyis ||  
sangs rgyas zhing kun mngon du snang |  
50: sna tshogs tshal ] MS sna tshogs ~~la~~ tshal

spos kyī phye ma dam pa dang |  
men tog <sub>[r21]</sub> dri zhim bsung ba'i ngad || [55]  
mchog rnams sna tshogs rgyun myi 'chad ||  
55: bsung ba'i ngad ] MS gsung ba'i ngad

rin cen pad mo bzang skyes pa' | <sub>[r22]</sub>  
de dag thams cad gcig las kyang ||

blta na sdug cing mdzes pa+ī ||

+dab ma bye ma +bum phrag stong || [60]

58: thams cad and kyang || written below the line

59: cing mdzes written below the line

60: +bum phrag stong ] MS +~~bum~~bum phrag stong? It is very hard to see what has been cancelled here.

dbyībs legs kha dog <sub>[r23]</sub> sna mang po ||

+dab ma de dag gcīg las kyang ||

'od zer gya nom grangs myed 'phro |

de'i 'od zer re re <sub>[r24]</sub> las ||

sangs rgyas mtshan ldan mang po +byung | [65]

phyogs bcu kun du mngon bar gshegs |

sems can <sub>[r25]</sub> grangs myed bstan drang ste ||

yang dag chos la bde bar 'jog |

snang ba mtha' yas de zhīng na |

sa gzhi <sub>[r26]</sub> gser gyī bye ma bdal | [70]

rīn cen dra ba bla re bres ||

+phreng ba sna tshogs lda ldī bkye ||

phyogs mtshams <sub>[r27]</sub> ma lus rgyan gyīs spud ||

mun pa mtshan mo gnag pa dang |

gnyī zla mye'i 'od kyang myed | [75]

mtshan <sub>[r28]</sub> ma dmyīgs pa+ī gzugs rnams dang |

sbu ba sgyu ma log 'gro myed |

de bzhīn gshegs pa+ī <sub>[r29]</sub> byīn rlabs kyīs |

ston pa mdzad pa ma gtogso ||

76: mtshan ma ] There is a character after ma, but I cannot read it, and it may be cancelled.

77: sbu ba ] MS bu sba; this word is also found as dbu ba and lbu ba, but the proposed form is closest to what is written in the MS. Suggestion thanks to B.K. Jansen.

snang ba mtha' yas de zhīng na | [80]

sems can skye ba <sub>[r30]</sub> thams cad kyang |

rīn cen pad mo'i nang nas skye ||

de nas lus rjes shī 'phos nas |

bla myed yang dag <sub>[r31]</sub> byang cub du ||

myī gnas mya ngan 'das par 'gyur | [85]

'phags pa kun du spyān ras gzīgs || <sub>[r32]</sub>

mthu chen thob pa+ī byang cub gnyīs |

sngon gyī smon lam phrīn las kyīs ||

snang ba mtha' <sub>[r33]</sub> yas 'khor na bzhugs |



thugs rje chen po tshad myed pas || [90]

myi 'jigs bzhi'i mnga' dang [r34] ldan |

86: spyen ras gzigs ] MS spyen ras gzigs

88: sngon ] MS sngon sngon

91: bzhi'i ] MS bzhi'i ba

mtshan grags sems can sus thos pa+

sdug bsngal sna tshogs kun las thard |

myi lus [r35] 'jig rten +dir skyes pa ||

mying nas phyung ste ... [95]

95: mying nas ] MS mying na

... ba 'di nyid kyī |

'di tshe gson gyī dus na yang |

dkon mchog [r36] gsum la skyabsu mchīs |

95–96: The scribe evidently skipped some text; it is not possible to imagine how much text has been lost, but minimally three syllables in each of the partial lines; there may, however, have also been other lines intervening.

byang cub mchog du sems kyang bskyed ||

bde ba can gyī yul du dmyīgs [r37] [100]

snang ba mtha' yas mtshan nas brjod ||

de nas tshe 'phos lnga phung por |

bdag cag gnyen [r38] bshes phyī mas kyang

'das tang mthur bar der dmyīgs te ||

bde ba'i 'jig rten de ru bskyal || [r39] [105]

snang ba mtha yas phug tu dbul ||

'phags pa spyen ras gzigs la bsngo ||

sems can 'dul [r40] ba+i skal du bzhes ||

bskyal ba gzhan du ma lags te ||

pha rol phyin bcus slad nas bskyal || [r41] [110]

sbyin ba'i phor phyin pa yīs ||

ser sna yī dags lam las bsgral ||

tshul khrims pha rol phyin pa yīs || [r42]

log pa'i tshul khrims lam la[s b]sgral ||

bzod pa'i pha rol phyin pa yīs | [115]

bdag mthong nyon mongs lam <las> [r43] bsgrald ||

brtson grus pha rol phyin<sub>[r44]</sub> pa yīs ||  
le lo zhan pa'i lam las bsgral ||

bsam brtan pha rol phyin pa yīs ||  
'khrug long rnam rtog lam las bsgrald || [120]

shes rab pha rol phyin pa yīs ||  
chags par lta ba'i<sub>[r45]</sub> lam las bsgral ||

thabs mkhas pha rol *<phyin>* pa yīs ||  
lha myī nyan thos kun las bsgral ||

stobs chen pha<sub>[r46]</sub> rol phyin pa yīs || [125]  
stobs bcu mthu chen sa ru bsgrald ||

smon lam pha rol phyin pa yīs ||  
smon myed sgo<sub>[r47]</sub> mor chud par bsgrald ||

ye shes pha rol phyin pa' yīs ||  
'du shes rnam rtog yongs las bsgrald || [130]

lha myī<sub>[r48]</sub> longs spyod skyid pa dang |  
'khor ba gzhan du myī bskyal te ||  
bde ba'i +jig rten der bskyal nas ||  
snying po byang<sub>[r49]</sub> cub mchog du bskyal ||

131: skyid pa dang ] MS spyø skyid pa dang, with skyid below the line.

bsu ba snang ba mtha' yas pa+ || [135]  
thu[g]s rje chen po'i byin rlabs kyīs |  
thogs pa myed<sub>[r50]</sub> par mdun du gshegs ||

mya ngan 'od pa kun rgal te ||  
snang ba mtha' yas gnas rab du ||  
yud tsam cig<sub>[r51]</sub> gīs skye bar 'gyur || [140]

skye bas skye ba myī bstsal te ||  
skye ba myed pas skye ba bstsal ||

'khor bas 'khor ba<sub>[r52]</sub> myī bstsal te ||  
'khor ba myed pas 'khor ba bstsal ||

bya bas bya [ba]<sub>[r53]</sub> myī bstsal te || [145]  
bya ba myed pas bya *<ba>* bstsal ||

skye ba myed na 'chī ba yang myed ||

skye yod <sub>[v1]</sub> 'chi yod de bstsal na ||  
 skye myed 'khor myed de bstsal na ||  
 dka' thub theg chen de spyad de || [150]  
 ngan song rgyud drug lam <sub>[v2]</sub> bcad cing ||  
 theg pa'i skas la rim 'dzeg ste ||  
 snang ba mtha' yas gnas <sub>[v3]</sub> rab du ||  
 rnam dag zhing der skye bar shog || <sub>[r54]</sub>

147: skye ba myed na ] MS skye ba myed pa na

149: this line follows 144 in the MS; the line was evidently displaced somehow in copying.

151: ngan song ] MS ngan dzong

152: rim 'dzeg ste ] MS rim 'dzeg eñg ste

|| theg pa chen po'i smon lam rdzogs so || [155]

155: smon lam ] MS smon lan

### The Translation:<sup>9</sup>

[This prayer accomplishes] Sending a deceased person to heaven by blessing him with the Three Jewels.

Homage to the Three Jewels, which appear in the past, present and future!

May all all living beings go to  
 The domain of the play of compassion  
 Of the buddhas, Blessed Ones, of the ten directions, [5]  
 Possessed of matchless wisdom and compassion.

Equal in their compassion toward all living beings,  
 The guides, making use of their magical skillful means,  
 Carry out their activities [all the way] down to the hells.

In an instant [they] accomplish [their salvific aim], and [10]  
 Existing in all of the three times are capable of this task.

Being omnipresent like the sky, and  
 Possessed of the [ten] powers and [four] fearlessnesses,  
 May [you] omniscient ones look favorably on this [deceased person for whom we pray].

We who take refuge [in you]: [15]  
 We do not [take refuge] in others [who lead to] erroneous destinies, but  
 We take refuge in the Three Jewels.

Our ambition is not for [anything] else, but  
 We make [only] the aspiration to Ultimate Awakening.

<sup>9</sup>. In the following, while many things may remain unclear, only especially problematic passages are marked with †.

Our objective is not for [anything] else, but [20]  
We will fix ourselves on the essence, the Ultimate Awakening.

Not [directing ourselves] toward other courses of conduct,  
We will never abandon the highest goals.

We will not [set ourselves] on another resolve, but  
We will be set ourselves on that signless Great Vehicle. [25]

We will not [enter the doorway] toward other aspirational vows, but  
We will enter the doorway that leads to the wishless liberation.

Being a single realm, [vast as] the sky in the ten directions,  
It is indivisible in the Southern, Northern, Eastern or Western directions.

The good qualities of the buddhas being equal, [30]  
There are no distinctions of importance among them.  
But because living beings have different propensities of faith,  
The buddhas taught them under different names,  
And creatures generate [different pieties] according to their own abilities and wishes.

[Among the different worlds of the respective buddhas,] in the pure world of the West [35]  
Dwells the buddha [named] Endless Radiance.  
He had practiced purity [as Dharmākara bodhisattva],  
And [consequently] in that land there is joy and limitless bliss.

In the land of that [buddha] Endless Radiance,  
There is no enclosure all around by iron mountains, [40]  
Nor Mount Sumeru, nor any other mountains,  
And no seas, nor rivers, nor waterfalls.  
[However, there are ponds filled with] the water of eight excellent qualities.

In that [land] voices ring out:  
[They call out] the names of the Three Jewels and [45]  
The ten perfections, and so on, and  
Pleasant sounds expressing the Ultimate Meaning spontaneously manifest.

In the land of that [buddha] Endless Radiance,  
There are many sandalwood incense trees,  
And groves [filled with trees] of manifold jewels. [50]  
Their branches, leaves, flowers,  
Pith and fruit radiate light,  
Illuminating the entire Buddha land.

Most wonderful powdered incense and  
Sweet-smelling flowers make the breeze aromatic, and [55]  
Their diverse wonders flow forth without interruption.

Lovely jeweled lotuses grow there,  
And from each and every one of them  
[Emerge] a trillion flower petals,  
Beautiful and gorgeous to behold. [60]

Beautifully formed, in multitudinous colors,  
And from each and every one of the petals  
Emanate innumerable excellent rays of light.  
From each one of those rays of light  
Arise many buddhas endowed with their [characteristic] marks. [65]

They visibly go to all of the ten directions of space, and,  
Teaching and guiding innumerable living beings,  
They joyfully set them on the path toward the true Teaching.

In the land of that [buddha] Endless Radiance,  
The surface of the ground is spread over with golden sands. [70]

Jeweled nets and canopies are spread out, and  
A multitude of garlands shoot out tassels,  
Which adorn everything in all directions.

There is no darkness or black night,  
No radiant light of sun, moon or fire; [75]  
There are no characteristic marks, no apprehensible forms,  
No bubbles of foam, no illusions, no erroneous destinies,  
Except for those created, in order to teach,  
By the Tathāgata's magical power.

In the land of that [buddha] Endless Radiance, [80]  
Every one of the living beings born there  
Is born from within a jeweled lotus.

Then, having exchanged bodies and died,  
They will pass on to Unexcelled Perfect Awakening  
And the non-abiding nirvāṇa. [85]

The two bodhisattvas Noble Avalokiteśvara and  
Mahāsthāmaprāpta,  
Through the working of the primal vow [of Amitābha],  
Are situated in the assembly of [the buddha] Endless Radiance,

And with their immeasurable great compassion [90]  
Are possessed of the power of the four fearlessnesses.

Whichever living being hears the name [of this buddha]  
Will be liberated from all the various kinds of sufferings.

Those born here in this [Sahā] world with a human body,  
Summoning him by name ... [95]

... precisely this;  
Even during this [very] lifetime,  
They [should] take refuge in the Three Jewels.

They will generate the aspiration to the Ultimate Awakening as well, and  
Focusing the mind on the Land of Bliss, [100]  
[Living beings] should call out the name of [the buddha] Endless Radiance.

Then, at the time of death and bodily dissolution,  
They imagine that their future relatives and friends  
Like those who have already died, will be there with them,  
And they will accompany them to the Land of Bliss. [105]

[The buddha] Endless Radiance will lead them inside [the land],  
And will place them in the care of the Noble Avalokiteśvara.

[That buddha] takes as his task to train those living beings who are to be saved;  
He does not [guide them] by another guide, but  
He then guides them with the ten perfections: [110]

With the perfection of charity,  
He will save them from the path of avarice and hungry ghosts.

With the perfection of discipline,  
He will save them from the path of wrong behavior.

With the perfection of patient acceptance, [115]  
He will save them from the path of the defilement of the view of the real existence of a self.

With the perfection of energy,  
He will save them from the path of indolence.

With the perfection of concentration,  
He will save them from the path of tumult and over-thinking. [120]

With the perfection of wisdom,

He will save them from the path of views [that foster] attachment.

With the perfection of skilful means,  
He will save them from all [paths] of gods, men and śrāvakas.

With the perfection of power, [125]  
He will save them †along the mighty stages of the ten powers†.

With the perfection of vows,  
He will save them †as they† enter into the gate of wishlessness.

With the perfection of knowledge,  
He will save them from all notions and analytical thought. [130]

He will not guide them to other destinies,  
Or to happy enjoyment with their lot [merely] as god or human;  
[Rather,] after guiding them to the Land of Bliss,  
He will guide them to the essence, the Ultimate Awakening.

[The buddha] Endless Radiance who greets [beings], [135]  
Empowered by his great compassion,  
Comes before them unhindered.

Passing over all floods of suffering,  
They will be born instantaneously  
In the supreme realm of [the buddha] Endless Radiance. [140]

He does not remove birth with birth;  
He removes birth with the absence of birth.

He does not remove transmigration with transmigration;  
He removes transmigration with the absence of transmigration.

†He does not remove actions with actions; [145]  
He removes actions with the absence of actions.†

If one is without birth, then one is also without death.  
If one removes the existence of birth and the existence of death,  
And if one removes the absence of birth and the absence of death,  
And thus practices the Great Vehicle of austerities, then [150]  
Cutting off the continuity of the six paths, [beginning with] unfortunate destinies,  
One ascends in stages the ladder of the Vehicles;  
Come! May you be born in the pure realm,  
In the supreme realm of [the buddha] Endless Radiance!

**Commentary:**

Though without implication that these were the direct, the only, or even necessarily the most important sources of the author, since it is clear that the ultimate influence of the sūtras is starkly evident throughout, I concentrate my references below on the scriptural sources of Chinese Amitābha traditions, the Larger *Sukhavatīvyūha* for the most part, in two of its versions, with occasional reference also to the *Amituo jing* (Smaller *Sukhavatīvyūha*) and *Guan Wuliangshoufo jing* (Contemplation sūtra). As far as they Larger sūtra is concerned, the two versions primary here are, first, the *Fo shuo Wuliangshou jing* (佛說無量壽經, T. 360), to be attributed to Buddhābhadda (359-429) and Baoyun (寶雲, 376-449). The second is the *Wuliangshou rulai hui* (無量壽如來會, T. 310 [5]), found in the *Mahāratnakūṭa* collection and translated by Bodhiruci in the early seventh-century. Both of these were known at Dunhuang, with the second even translated into Tibetan. I cite this translation below from my own forthcoming edition, when it is available. It is my impression that the wording in these two Chinese versions (which is often divergent) proves closer to the expressions in the poem than do the wordings in other versions of the sūtra.

10–11:

Matthew Kapstein suggests “something like: ‘pervading the three times in a single instant of attainment, you are met throughout limitless space.’”

13:

M. Kapstein suggests that *thub ldan* might be emended to *thugs ldan*.

16:

The term *log 'gro* is found also below in 19d, and noted in another Dunhuang text by Imaeda 2007: 146 as follows: “erroneous destinies (*log 'gro* =? *ngan 'gro* = *durgati*).” I tentatively follow his speculation here as to the meaning of the term. However the sense remains unclear.

18:

*bskyed* is somewhat difficult here. In translating I follow the advice of Charles Ramble.

24:

Although *yi dam* often refers to deities, here it has the sense of resolve or fixed purpose, as pointed out to me by Matthew Kapstein.

27ff.

Although perhaps not directly related even conceptually to our text, and many centuries later, in a 1584 work by Yunqi Zhuhong (雲棲株宏, 1535–1615), the *Da jingtu sishiba wen* (答淨土四十八問, Answers to Forty-Eight Questions about Pure Land), we find as the thirtieth question the following:<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>. Trans. Jones 2018: 445; text CBETA X.1158, 509a12–b3: 問。懺中所禮佛。乃盡三世。而所念佛。獨一彌陀。固謂三世諸佛無稱名之願耳。然彌陀亦有多名。具在經中。隨取一名持之。得否。據小彌陀經。翻為無量壽。無量光。而觀經獨稱無量壽者。豈能觀之智。所觀之光。即為光耶。六方佛中。其西亦有無量壽者。即是此佛自讚



Question: When a person engages in worship of the Buddha, every one of the buddhas knows; the buddhas of the ten directions come in welcome. Why does that person have a [particular] direction to face? All buddhas are identical in their fundamental natures, identical in their particular manifestations, identical in everything. The one invoking (or contemplating) the Buddha accords with all the buddhas of the ten directions who come to meet and guide [them to the Pure Land]. If only the three holy ones of a single direction come in welcome when one invokes (or contemplates), then one's views are one-sided and shallow.

Answer: The buddhas know everything, but they do not go forth in an unruly crowd. Since one assiduously concentrates on one buddha, then [that buddha] is automatically in accordance through sympathetic resonance (*ganying* 感應). A practitioner of Pure Land causes all the buddhas to manifest equally, but there must be a main [buddha] and attendant [buddhas]. Amitābha manifests alone, with clouds of transformation-buddhas following. The principle of cause and effect works like this; it is not that their attainment is one-sided and shallow.

30ff.

I understand the text here to be saying that while there is ultimately one buddha-principle, this manifests under the names of different buddhas. Through the use of *upāya*, perhaps, although this is not mentioned, the Buddha/buddhas teach according to the propensities of beings.

37:

As a bodhisattva, Dharmākara practiced the pure practices which resulted in the creation of the Land of Bliss. T. 360 (XII) 267c10–13: 時法藏比丘攝取二百一十億諸佛妙土清淨之行。如是修已, 詣彼佛所, 稽首禮足, 遶佛三匝, 合掌而住。白言世尊: 「我已攝取莊嚴佛土清淨之行」。Inagaki 2003: 12: “After that, Dharmākara Bodhisattva adopted the pure practices that had led to the establishment of the excellent lands of two hundred and ten *koṭis* of buddhas. When he had finished this task, he went to the Buddha, knelt down at his feet, walked around him three times, joined his palms in worship, and sat down. He then said to the Buddha, ‘I have adopted the pure practices for the establishment of a glorious buddha land.’”

38:

Compare the text in Pelliot tibétain 16 (ed. and trans. Kapstein 2004a: 44, 20): *'jigs rten las 'das pa 'i skyid pa phun sum tshogs pa thams cad kyis brgyan pa 'i zhing*, “it is a field adorned with all and perfect world-transcending happiness.”

40:

For *'khor ra 'khor*, see Dietz 2000: 14.

40–41:

T. 310 (5) (XI) 96c16–17: 復次, 阿難, 彼極樂界, 無諸黑山、鐵圍山、大鐵圍山、妙高山等. The

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否耶。

答。如來名號。誠曰多端。但取偏熟眾生耳根。於中實無差別。惟彼彌陀之號。普徧十方。故令稱念之人。皆歸一致。且無量壽是唐言。阿彌陀乃梵語。而壽量現等虛空。光明徧宇宙。舉體該用。但云無量壽足矣。若夫十方諸佛。覈之歷有同名。釋迦尊稱。多之至於無算。極樂教主。何獨不然。非佛自讚。亦無疑矣。今時有人執念釋迦而不念彌陀者。自以為是。拗眾稱高。噫。釋迦使汝師彌陀。而汝不從教。譬之子違父命。而不就明師。雖日呼其父。安得不云忤逆。

Tibetan translation of this passage is found in PT 557A1: gzhan yang kun dga' bo 'jig rten gyi kham bde ba can de na ri nag po rnam dang | lcags ri khor yug dang | khor yug chen po dang | ri 'i rgyal po ri rab las stsogs pa yang myed do |. “Furthermore, Ānanda, in that realm of Ultimate Bliss, there are no black mountains, no iron-encircling mountains, no great iron-encircling mountains (Tib. omits iron), no Mount Sumeru.”

If the poem is based on depictions in the Larger *Sukhāvativyūha*, this translation is likely to be the source for the author of our text here, as this is the only version of the sūtra which mentions iron mountains.

T. 360 (XII) 270a13: 無大海小海溪渠井谷; T. 362 (XII) 303b28–c1: 其國土無有大海, 亦無有小海水, 亦無江河恒水也, 亦無有山林溪谷 ≈ T. 361 (XII) 283a11–12: 其國土無有大海水, 亦無小海水, 無江河洹水也, 亦無山林溪谷. Inagaki 2003: 21 renders T. 360: “[In that land, there are no mountains, such as Mount Sumeru and the Encircling Adamantine Mountains.] Likewise, there are neither oceans nor seas and neither valleys nor gorges.”

42:

The word *rtsang po* is more commonly *gtsang po*, but *rtsang po* is well attested in Old Tibetan.

43:

In the *Amituo jing* (Smaller *Sukhāvativyūha*), T. 366 (XII) 364c16–347a1: 極樂國土有七寶池, 八功德水充滿其中, “[There are lotus pools] in the world sphere Sukhāvātī made of the seven jewels, full of the water of the eight excellent qualities.” The same is found in the Larger sūtra: T. 360 (XII) 271a27–29: 内外左右有諸浴池。或十由旬。或二十三十。乃至百千由旬。縱廣深淺各皆一等。八功德水湛然盈滿, Inagaki 2003: 26: “Inside and out, to right and left, are bathing ponds. Some of them are ten yojanas in length, breadth, and depth; some are twenty yojanas; others, thirty; and so on, until we come to those measuring a hundred thousand yojanas in length, breadth, and depth. They are full to the brim with the water that possesses the eight excellent qualities, clear, fragrant, and tasting like nectar.”

44–47:

There is perhaps a resonance here of a passage in the Smaller sūtra (T. 366 [XII] 347a14–16): 是諸眾鳥, 晝夜六時, 出和雅音, 其音演暢五根、五力、七菩提分、八聖道分如是等法。其土眾生聞是音已, 皆悉念佛、念法、念僧, “These various birds in the six periods of the day and night make harmonious and elegant sounds, which proclaim the five faculties, the five powers, the seven factors of awakening, the elements of the eight paths of truth, and such teachings as these. The beings in that land, having heard these sounds, all raise the mindfulness of the Buddha, the mindfulness of the Dharma, and the mindfulness of the Saṅgha.” We will see the ten perfections return below.

45:

For *tang* it might be possible to understand a form of what is more normally spelt *gtong ba*. However, it appears rather to be a form of *dang*, as in lines 43 and 104.

49:

T. 360 (XII) 271b6–7: 其池岸上有梅檀樹, Inagaki 2003: 26: “On the banks of these ponds are

sandalwood trees”; T. 310 (5) (XI) 97a2: 居兩岸邊多栴檀樹。

50:

T. 360 (XII) 270c6: 其國土七寶諸樹周滿世界, Inagaki 2003: 24: “seven-jeweled trees completely fill that land”; T. 310 (5) (XI) 96a27–28: 彼如來國多諸寶樹。

50–53:

There is much discussion of the trees of many jewels in the Larger sūtra, but no phrase close to this reference to radiation of light. However, in the Contemplation sūtra (*Guan Wuliang-shoufo jing*, 觀無量壽佛經) we read: T. 365 (XII) 342b1–7: 佛告阿難及韋提希: 地想成已, 次觀寶樹。觀寶樹者, 一一觀之作七重行樹想。一一樹高八千由旬, 其諸寶樹, 七寶花葉無不具足。一一華葉作異寶色: 琉璃色中, 出金色光。頗梨色中, 出紅色光。馬腦色中, 出車光。磤磤色中, 出綠真珠光。珊瑚、琥珀一切衆寶以爲映飾。 Yamada 1984: 35: “The Buddha said to Ānanda and Vaidehī: ‘When the perception of the ground has been completed, next perceive the jeweled trees. In perceiving these jeweled trees, perceive them one by one, and form a perception of these trees in rows seven deep. Each tree is eight thousand yojanas high, and not a single jeweled tree lacks flowers and leaves made of the seven kinds of jewels. Each flower and leaf is the color of a different jewel—from the color of lapis lazuli is emitted a golden ray of light; from the color of crystal, a crimson ray of light; from the color of emerald, a sapphire ray of light; from the color of sapphire, a pearl-green ray of light. In addition, there are coral, amber, and all the other kinds of jewels serving as dazzling ornaments.’”

Although this seems related to our passage, it does not appear that other imagery in our text is related to the Contemplation sūtra.

54–56:

T. 310 (5) (XI) 97b3–6: 復有無量如意妙香、塗香、末香, 其香普熏彼佛國界。及散花幢幡亦皆遍滿。其有欲聞香者, 隨願即聞, 或不樂者, 終無所受。 Tibetan version in PT 563 3a2–5: gzhan yang yid<sup>(3)</sup> bzhin kyi spos dang | byug spos dang | spos kyi phye ma dag po dgu du myed pa dang ldan bas | spos kyi dri des sangs rgyas gyi zhing de kun du khyab par byed do | me tog gtor<sup>(4)</sup> ba dang | rgyal mtshan dang | ba dan dag gyis kun du khyab par byed de | gang dag spos kyi bsung de snom bar ’dod pa dag ni ci ltar mos pa bzhin du snam bar ’gyur la |<sup>(5)</sup> gang ma mos pa de dag gyi ni nams kyang tshar bar myi ’gyur ro |. Chang 1983: 351 renders the Chinese: “Moreover, there are unlimited quantities of the most agreeable incense, perfumed ointment, and powdered incense, the fragrance of which permeates all that Buddha-land. Also found everywhere are banners and scattered flowers. Those who wish to smell the fragrance will smell it at will, while those who do not wish to will smell nothing.”

57–65:

Speaking of bejeweled lotuses, we find in T. 310 (5) (XI) 97c2–10: 阿難, 彼佛國中有七寶蓮花, 一一蓮花有無量百千億葉, 其葉有無量百千珍奇異色, 以百千摩尼妙寶莊嚴, 覆以寶網轉相映飾。阿難, 彼蓮花量或半由旬, 或一二三四乃至百千由旬者。一一花出三十六億那由他百千光明, 一一光中出三十六億那由他百千諸佛, 身如金色, 具三十二大丈夫相、八十隨好, 殊勝莊嚴, 放百千光普照世界, in Tibetan in PT 563 4b6–5a4: kun dga’ bo sangs rgyas de’i shing khams na rin po che sna bdun gyi pad<sup>(7)</sup> ma dag yod de | pad ma re re la yang ’dab ma byed ba brgya sgong tshad myed pa snyed yod do | ’dab ma de dag kyang kha dog tha dad pa brgya stong

tshad myed pa dang ldan de | (8) nor bu rin po che brgya stong gis rab du brgyan cing | rin po che 'i dra bas khebs pas phan tshun gcig gis gcig brgyan par gyur pa 'o | (5a1) kun dga' bo pad ma de dag gyi tshad kyang kha cig ni dpag tshad phyed tsam mo | kha cig ni dpag tshad cig dang | gnyis dang sum dang bzhi nas dpag (2) tshad brgya stong gyi bar du 'o | pad ma de dag re re las kyang 'od gzer bye ba stong phrag sum cu rtsa drug 'byung ngo | 'od gzer re re las kyang sangs rgyas (3) kyi ska gser gi kha dog can skyes bu chen po 'i mtshan sum cu rtsa gnyis dang | dpe bya bzang po brgyad cus khyad bar du brgyan pa bye ba stong (4) phyag sum cu rtsa drug 'byung ste | 'od gzer brgya stong bke bas 'jig rten kyi khams kun ma lus par gsal ba mdzad do |. In T. 360 (XII) 272a22–b1 we find: 又衆寶蓮華周滿世界。一一寶華百千億葉。其華光明無量種色：青色青光，白色白光，玄黃朱紫光色亦然。煒燁煥爛明曜日月。一一華中。出三十六百千億光。一一光中。出三十六百千億佛。身色紫金相好殊特。一一諸佛。又放百千光明。普爲十方說微妙法。如是諸佛。各各安立無量衆生於佛正道, Inagaki 2003: 30: “Moreover, lotus flowers of various jewels fill the land; each has a hundred thousand koṭis of petals with lights of numerous colors—green lotuses glow with a green light; white ones with a white light; and likewise dark blue, yellow, red, and purple lotuses glow with lights of their respective colors. The brilliance of these lights is so magnificent that it outshines the sun and moon. Each flower emits thirty-six hundred thousand koṭis of rays of light, each sending forth thirty-six hundred thousand koṭis of buddhas. The bodies of these buddhas are purple-gold, and their physical characteristics and marks are superb beyond compare. Each buddha emits a hundred thousand rays of light and expounds the wonderful Dharma to beings in the ten directions, thus setting innumerable beings on the right path of the Buddha.”

70:

The scriptures refer to the ponds as having golden sands strewn on their bottoms, but not as far as I know the surface of the land itself. However, in the Smaller sūtra we do read (T. 366 [XII] 347a7): 又舍利弗，彼佛國土常作天樂。黃金為地，“Again, Śāriputra, that buddha land always resounds with heavenly music. The ground is pure gold.”

71:

T. 310 (XI) 96b21–24: 於其樹上，有諸金鎖垂寶瓔珞周遍莊嚴，謂盧遮迦寶、末瑳寶，及赤白青色真珠等，寶以為瓔珞。有師子雲聚寶等以為其鎖，飾諸寶柱， Chang 1983: 249: “The bodhi-tree is adorned all around with gold chains from which hang jeweled tassels made of various gems, red, white, and green pearls, and so forth. The jeweled columns [of the bodhi-tree] are decorated with chains made of ‘lion-cloud-gathering’ gems.; T. 360 (XII) 272a11–13: 無量寶網彌覆佛土，皆以金縷、真珠、百千雜寶奇妙珍異。莊嚴校飾周匝四面垂以寶鈴，光色晃曜盡極嚴麗， Inagaki 2003: 29: “In that buddha land there are innumerable jeweled nets, all adorned with skeins of gold thread, pearls, and a hundred thousand kinds of rare and marvelous treasures. All around the nets hang jeweled bells of the utmost beauty, which shine brilliantly.”

74–75:

T. 310 (5) (XI) 97c12–16: 復次，阿難，極樂世界無有昏闇亦無火光，涌泉陂湖彼皆非有，亦無住著家室林苑之名，及表示之像幼童色類。亦無日、月、晝、夜之像。於一切處標式既無亦無名號，唯除如來所加威者， in Tibetan in PT 365 5a6–b3: gzhan yang kun (7) dga' bo 'jig rten kyi khams bde ba can na ni mun pa mun nag dang | mye'i 'od dang | chu myig dang | lteng ka

yang myed do | khyim gyi gnas dang | <sup>(b1)</sup> bskyed mos tshal la mngon bar zhes pa'i mying dang | byis ba dang | gzhon nur gdags pa'i rnam pa yang myed do | nyi ma dang | zla ba dang | nyin mo dang | mtshan mor gdags <sup>(2)</sup> pa yang myed do | de na gnas thams cad du mtshan mar bstan pa myed pa nyid kyis mying du gdags pa yang myed de | de bzhin gshegs pas byin kyis brlabs pa ni ma <sup>(3)</sup> gtogs so |. Chang 1983: 352: "Furthermore, Ānanda, in the Land of Utmost Bliss, there is no darkness or gloom, nor the light of fire. There is no name for spring, pond or lake. There is no name for residence, home, grove or garden. There is no kind of symbol of expression to denote children. There is no sun or moon, day or night. There is no designation or name anywhere except those which are blessed by the Tathāgata."

This has no parallel in T. 360, but is found in the Sanskrit text and others, in one form or another.

77:

The phrase of reference to something being as insubstantial as foam or an illusion is stock, as for example in *Śūnyatāsaptati* 66: 'du byed dri za'i grong khyer dang || *sgyu ma smig rgyu skra shad dang* || *dbu ba chu bur sprul pa dang* || *rmi lam mgal me'i 'khor lo mtshungs* ||, though examples could easily be multiplied.

80–82:

T. 360 (XII) 278a28–b6: 若有衆生。明信佛智乃至勝智。作諸功德信心迴向。此諸衆生於七寶華中自然化生跏趺而坐。須臾之頃。身相光明智慧功德。如諸菩薩具足成就。復次慈氏。他方諸大菩薩。發心欲見無量壽佛。恭敬供養及諸菩薩聲聞之衆。彼菩薩等。命終得生無量壽國。於七寶華中自然化生。 Inagaki 2003: 58: "If there are sentient beings who with resolute faith accept these kinds of wisdom, from the Buddha's wisdom to the supreme wisdom, do meritorious deeds, and sincerely transfer the merit acquired [to that land], those beings will be spontaneously born by transformation, seated with legs crossed, in the seven-jeweled lotus flowers, and instantly attain the same glorious forms, wisdom, and virtue as those of the bodhisattvas there. Further, Maitreya, if great bodhisattvas in the buddha lands of other directions desire to see Amitāyus, and revere and make offerings to him and the hosts of bodhisattvas and śrāvakas, they will, after death, be born in the land of Amitāyus. Spontaneously transformed, they will be born from within the seven-jeweled lotus flowers." Cp. T. 310 (XI) 100a21–b8.

83–85:

T. 310 (5) (XI) 97c16–18: 阿難, 彼國眾生若當生者, 皆悉究竟無上菩提, 到涅槃處, in Tibetan in PT 365 5b3–4: kun dga' bo der sems can gang dag skyes pa dang | skye ba dang | skye bar 'gyur ba de dag thams cad ni mthar bla na myed pa'i byang chub du yongs <sup>(4)</sup> su mye [*sic*] ngan las 'das bar 'gyur ro |, "Ānanda, beings who will be born in that land will all ultimately attain unexcelled supreme awakening and reach the status of nirvāṇa." Cp. Chang 1983: 352. We might note, however, that this seems to contrast in some way with the fifteenth vow of Dharmākara, which reads: T. 360 (XII) 268a20–21: 設我得佛, 國中人天壽命無能限量, 除其本願脩短自在, 若不爾者, 不取正覺, Inagaki 2003: 14: "If, when I attain buddhahood, humans and devas in my land should have limited lifespans, except when they wish to shorten them in accordance with their original vows, may I not attain perfect enlightenment." The shortening of life referred to here is generally understood to mean returning to earth to carry out bodhi-

sattva activities, not to attaining final nirvāṇa.

86–91:

Although it is not theologically problematic, the *Sukhāvatīvyūha* sūtras do not say explicitly that Avalokiteśvara and Mahāsthāmaprāpta were born in the Pure Land thanks to Amitābha's vow. They do say T. 310 (XI) 98b27–28: 此二菩薩從娑婆世界, 捨壽量已往生彼國, Chang 1983: 353: “[T]hese two Bodhisattvas were born in that Buddha-land after their lifetimes came to an end in the Sahā World.”; T. 360 (XII) 273b25–27: 是二菩薩。於此國土修菩薩行。命終轉化生彼佛國, Inagaki 2003: 36–37: “They had both performed bodhisattva practices in this world and, at the end of their lives, were born by transformation in that buddha land.”

88:

I have understood *sngon gyi smon lam* to refer to Amitābha's *pūrvapraṇidhāna*, but it is not impossible that this somehow refers to the vows of the bodhisattvas instead.

92–93:

Although a number of Dharmākara's vows refer to the benefits to be gained from hearing the name of the buddha Amitābha, none is formulated in quite the terms we see here.

93:

I would normally understand the verb *thard* with the *da drag* to indicate a perfective sense, and therefore to indicate a completed action in the past. See Zeisler 2011: 864, who clearly understands *thard* to be a past form. However, theologically speaking we would not be unhappy to see it here as some sort of future. Moreover, there are a number of places in this text in which it is difficult to understand the *da drag* as indicating a perfective, as shown by the fluctuation in lines 112, 114, 116, 119, 120, 122, 124, 126 128, 130, where the same word appears both with and without the *da drag*, seemingly promiscuously. I therefore understand a future sense.

95–96:

Given the obvious fact that the scribe skipped text, it is difficult to construe the meaning of what might very well originally have been more than one verse.

102–105:

I am not certain whether the reference here is meant to be to specific death-bed practices, which are however well known throughout East Asia. In 102, *tshe 'phos lnga phung por* refers literally to the dissolution into the five *skandhas*.

110–130:

In the poem edited in Silk 2019a, verses 20–25 deal with the six perfections, while here we have the set of ten, less common and not found in the *Sukhāvatīvyūha*. The connection between a given perfection and the obstacle from which it saves beings is not always clear in the list, at least to me.

111:

Note the abbreviation *phor* for *pha rol (tu)* .

119:

The spelling *bsam brtan* is not uncommon at Dunhuang; see Stein 2010: 39n53, and Apple 2014 *passim*.

126:

The *ru* is a “case marking” here, but still I would not know what it would mean to save a being “on/along the mighty stages of the ten powers.”

128:

The translation here is far from certain. The wishless is referred to above in line 27.

141–150:

The rhetoric here is reminiscent of what we see in the \**Kāśyapaparivarta* §63, namely: *na śūnyatāyā dharmā śūnyā karoti dharmā eva śūnyā* | *yan nānimittena dharmān animittān karoti dharmā caivānimittāḥ* | *yan nāpraṇihitena dharmā[n a]praṇihitān karoti dharmā evāpraṇihitāḥ*, and so on, that is, “it is not that one makes things empty through emptiness — things themselves are empty; it is not that one makes things signless through the signless — things are signless; it is not that one makes things wishless through the wishless — things are wishless.”

150:

On the back of an 11-12th c. Amitāyus thangka in the Metropolitan Museum of Art (1989.284), we find the line *bzod pa dka' thub dam pa bzod pa'i* | (the reading due to Christian Luczanits). <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/37813>.

151:

It would be possible here to understand also “[Great] Vehicle.”

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